



radical
democracy



moumita ahmed.
people for bernie
millennials for revolution

Moumita Ahmed Interview

David Olson interviews Moumita Ahmed for Radical Democracy.

Moumita Ahmed has been a digital organizer with the Working Families Party, was National Grass Roots Coordinator for People for Bernie, and has worked on various political campaigns, including Zepher Teachout's 2014 run for Governor of New York. She cofounded the popular Millennials for Bernie Sanders Facebook group, now known as Millennials for Revolution. Her current project is a resistance base in Washington, D.C., known as the District 13 House.

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Radical Democracy: Instead of closing up shop after Clinton won the nomination, the group morphed into **Millennials for Revolution**. What's the motivation for the new group?

Moumita Ahmed: **We believe in continuing the political revolution that Bernie Sanders started**, but instead of waiting for another Bernie or another election campaign, we need a movement that defines our generation. We supported Bernie because he took the issues that we care about and brought it to the national platform. We want the same from

Moumita Ahmed Interview continued

the next president, and we want the same from every politician that runs for office. We need to claim our values and work as a collective, regardless of where we are geographically. We need to say, “These are the things we care about, and this is what we need our politicians to do if they want our votes.”

We're building a movement, not necessarily an organization, but we'll support organizations fighting for these things. We encourage people to get involved. We encourage people to vote for candidates that embody our values, but we also encourage people to join protests.

RD: As part of the strategy to channel that Bernie campaign energy into a movement, M4R recently published seven demands based on those shared values and issues you were referencing: ending systemic racism and investing in communities of color; banning fracking and switching to renewables; making college debt-free; a “Robin Hood” tax on financial transactions; a \$15 minimum wage; limiting corporate influence in politics by repealing Citizen’s United; and a Medicare-for-all public option for healthcare. Are there any priority or first step issues in this platform?

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

MA: We understand that all these demands are important, but **Trump represents a racist, xenophobic, aspect of politics that we have to fight at all costs.** Personally, I feel we should prioritize the Movement for Black Lives, because every issue somehow impacts our communities of color and immigrants the hardest. It's important for us as a movement to fight for Black lives. We need intersectionality in movements in order to succeed, and when we fight for each other, we can push for the kind of changes that we all need. Fighting police brutality, ending mass incarceration—anything that fights institutional racism is number one for us.

The second is climate change, the biggest national security threat of our lifetime—really biggest threat of our lifetime, period. We need politicians to look at all policies through the lens of climate change. We need policies that help us become more sustainable, and help us protect the communities that are going to be most affected by climate change.

RD: The student debt issue is blowing up—Bernie gave it a lot of attention in the Democratic primary, and now states like New York are moving towards making free university education a reality.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

MA: Student debt is a big, big issue for millennials. Our generation is basically defined by the amount of debt that we have. And the Fight for \$15 is important, because so many of us work low-wage jobs. Universal healthcare is also important. **We start with racial justice, but really, all seven demands are important. They define an entire generation.**

RD: M4R now has a platform or agenda, but it seems to operate less as a traditional organization and more as a network that focuses on messaging, on communication. It's a type of org that didn't really exist before the Internet.

MA: We're definitely not a traditional organization. We are mostly digital organizers, and our goal is to make sure that when the people march, that when people host actions, that what they're doing is pushed to the forefront on our national platforms via social media, so that everyone can see it—including the mainstream media.

We want to focus our generation on the larger fight that exists, the fight for values. We want people who share these values, these goals, to have a home—especially people who don't belong to an organization or party. I was never part of an organization. It's important to create something

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

where people don't feel like they need to be a member of anything. They just need to believe that these are the things that I want, these are the things I want to fight for, and that's it. I'm a millennial, for revolution.

RD: Has it been different organizing for a movement rather than a political campaign?

MA: With campaigns it's top-down, there's always people up-top making decisions. There are certain rules that you follow, and there are restrictions when it comes to messaging. If you're Bernie's campaign, you're not beholden to donors, but if you're a campaign that's taking money from Super PACs then you have all these limits about messaging, about what you can say— which is sort of what happened to Our Revolution, as I understand it.

When you're a grassroots movement, you're totally bottom-up. You're empowering the people who are interested in engaging in the electoral process, or engaging in movement building, and you're all working together to create this network of activists and volunteers and supporters, people that share these values.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

RD: The recent Women's March was organized immediately after Trump's election, and there was a Millennials March that supported it. But M4R had actually put out the call for a march before the election, when the general feeling was that Clinton would win.

MA: **The March wasn't just against Trump. The march was a way to challenge the next President of the United States on their values.** During this election we saw some candidates calling themselves progressive, but they didn't actually back progressive values.

The message is that no matter who the POTUS is, we are going to organize and challenge you until you meet our demands. We put out the call to action, and collaborated with a bunch of groups. The AFL-CIO and Fight for \$15 youth, DSA [Democratic Socialists of America], and YDS (Young Democratic Socialists), and YPDA [Young Progressives Demand Action]—a bunch of small student and youth groups within movements endorsed us.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

Obviously, I wasn't very happy with how the Hillary campaign was run, and I didn't like their message. Trump is clearly a threat, but I don't like to do anything out of fear, and that's really what the Clinton campaign's message was: you should vote for me out of fear of Trump.

RD: Before the election, the Left was preparing for an offensive fight against a Clinton-backed neoliberalism. Is there a danger that a fear-based resistance to Trump will stay focused on defense, instead of pressing for change?

MA: At least with Clinton we know what she's going to do, we know how she's going to operate, so there was a game plan. It's very hard as an activist because with Trump there is so much uncertainty. **We have to resist the Trump administration at all costs, but the resistance doesn't have to always be defensive.** We're rallying people around fighting Trump, no matter what, but some people are, like, "let's wait and see." But when we wait and see, we fail. So, we are going to resist no matter what. It's non-negotiable.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

We don't think Democrats should ever negotiate with Trump—and that's being offensive, in a way, not defensive. We're not waiting to respond, just like the Republicans don't "wait and see," ever. They act. Like we saw in North Carolina—that was embarrassing.

The Left can't be weak any more. We need to be stronger, we need to be more effective. We need to be fighting the Trump agenda at all costs, because we're already in danger. And **when you're in danger, you don't sit there like a coward and "wait and see."** You confront it, you face it. You be resilient.

RD: Right. You strategize. You study, you ask questions, you discuss and learn. You keep fighting.

MA: Linda Sarsour, head of the Arab American Association, said something amazing to me when I was talking with her about all this. She said, "Channel your inner Palestinian." And that's how I feel. We need to remember that we've been through worse, and we need to be resilient. We need to fight back—we can't just wait and see.

The Democrats need to listen to the people who are fighting—and that's us, the Left wing of the Democratic Party. It's that simple.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

RD: Folks in the movement right now, maybe especially millennials, are perfectly comfortable working within the Democratic as well as organizing to get people out into the streets, and shutting shit down. This seems like a very good sign to me, there's not a big debate going on as to which approach is better.

MA: **Yeah, we're all insider/outsiders.** I've always voted for Democrats and I've worked for them, but I'm not a loyalist. I don't believe in Party labels. It's really important for us to work together to build a resistance right now. It doesn't have to be through the Democratic Party, but we need to come together as a united front on the Left, and say we are going to occupy every office, every seat, everything. That should be our goal.

We need a platform based on a progressive agenda, based on values and issues that we care about. It doesn't matter whether you're a Democrat, a Green Party member or even a Libertarian.

When we talk about issues, we can connect to people. We've seen that with Bernie. We have to take the Bernie campaign ethos and implement it in the strategy for the fight ahead.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

It's simple; focus on issues. People are ready to embrace and work towards a progressive agenda. The Democrats need to understand that, and they have to be held accountable if they get in the way.

RD: There's a strong establishment wing of the party that's trying to hold on to power, and to its connection to corporate money. They're calling for unity and suggesting that the Left is being divisive for pushing for too much change.

MA: We're not being divisive. **We're saying look, you had your chance and you couldn't do it. So, now let us do it. Young people could really save the party.** The Republicans might even get a Constitutional majority—and that would be a threat not just for Democrats. That would be a threat for everybody.

RD: M4R recently announced a new project, the District 13 Resistance House, which is basically base for the movement in Washington, DC. What's that all about?

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

MA: In *The Hunger Games*, District 13 was the rebel district that supported all the other districts in their rebellion against the capitol. They showed the other districts that they were able to lead a successful rebellion against the capitol, and united the others in pursuit of doing the same. And that's what we're doing.

RD: How's the response been?

MA: We raised over \$35k in less than a week, and we rented a house in time for The Women's March. We've been getting a lot of press. **Everybody loves this project because it gives them hope—and it's really a big f-you to Trump.** It lets us be in his face from day one.

We're hoping that this idea will catch fire, and others will follow suit and create similar resistance houses across the country that can be used for future grass roots efforts.

RD: What sort of things do you envision happening at these resistance houses?

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

RD: What sort of things do you envision happening at the District 13 House?

MA: We created this resistance house for activists to have a place to store their stuff, and maybe stay if they need last minute housing when they come to DC. It's an opposition base. It can also be a place to hold workshops and trainings for people to get involved with organizations and grass-roots movements. A place to support people who have the passion and drive, but maybe not the resources. If they need a space to hold a meeting, they can do that, if they just want to meet for coffee, they can do that, too. They can come to the house to write a book, to write song lyrics—anything.

We want to build not just the resistance, but a culture of resistance. Because creating a culture of resistance is just as important. It's long-lasting, and we need that.

RD: "A culture of resistance." It reminds me of a quote from Jerry Rubin, from the Yippies. He said, "It's got to be more fun to be in the revolution than out of it." Don't just protest, but create a dynamic culture around resistance, around revolution.

MA: Yes!

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Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

RD: The Radical Democracy Project obviously focuses on radical change, which we define as systemic or institutional change, rather than policy or leadership change. M4R talks about a “commitment to fundamental change.” What does fundamental change mean to you, in the context of this political revolution?

MA: **Fundamental change would be a change in values that had our politicians and our entire government working to protect the middle class, and working class people. Working to help the poor—not just to increase profit, not just to support capitalism.**

Fundamental change is when your government understands that mass incarceration is hurting people of color. So why does it exist? Why do we still have it? It should have never existed. Normally, change means working within the system to maybe get something changed, eventually—but the people who created that system would still exist.

Moumita Ahmed Interview cont

Revolution is replacing those people and putting in people who understand that systemic racism in any circumstance is not okay. That's the kind of fundamental change I think we need.

RD: Right, so it's really a shift in priorities, or values that you're talking about. The change manifests in politics, but it doesn't start there. It's deeper.

MA: We need a fundamental shift in how we think, which I would call a revolution. We need a fundamental shift in how our government functions, how our politicians think. We need a new vision that includes us and our values, which doesn't currently exist. It has to be a shift in consciousness, and that starts bottom-up. We need to declare our values.

We need to say, **“This is what we need, and this is what we care about. I'm going to vote for my values, I'm going to get involved, and I'm going to fight.”**

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